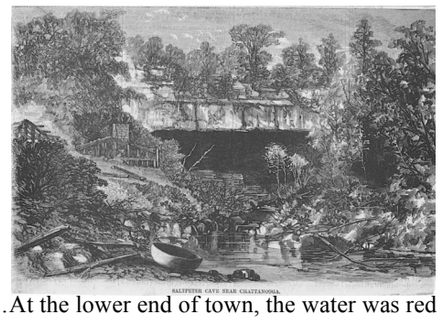
Nickajack Lock Limbo–Paddle Georgia 2025

June 21—Tennessee River

Distance: 14 miles **Starting Elevation: 628 feet** **Ending Elevation: 596 feet**

Pit Stops: **Mile 1.6**—Nickajack Dam Boat Ramp **Mile 7.4—**South Pittsburg Boat Ramp **Mile 14—**Bridgepoint Boat Ramp

Points of Interest


SALTPETER CAVE NEAR CHATTANOOGA.

Mile 0—Nickajack Cave—A half-mile across the cove from our launch site is this historic cave, now flooded by the waters of Nickajack Lake. It is a place of both biological and historic significance. Today, it is primarily home to federally-threatened gray bats, but in its previous iterations it was the haunt of Cherokees Indians, criminals, soldiers and even a wayward country music superstar. In the late 1700s, the village of Nickajack, home to Chickamauga Cherokees hostile to encroachment of settlers, was attacked by 500 men from Tennessee and Kentucky. "The Indians deserted their cabins and fled to the river," reported James Collier who participated in the attack. "Several Indians were killed in the river. One was laying on his face in a floating canoe, reaching his hands over each side and paddling. Several shot at him—I fired two or three times…I saw blood spurt out of the Indian's soldier, and he made no more efforts…At the lower end of town, the water was red with blood." The cave was later occupied by unsavory characters who used it as cover in attacking travelers on the river. During the Civil War, the cave was the site of gunpowder production for both the Union and Confederate armies (a manufacturing process made possible by nitrogen-rich guano—commonly called bat poo--accumulated on the cave floor). A February 1864 Harper's Weekly story described the cave thusly: It is "spanned horizontally like the massive entablature of an Egyptian temple. From the opening issues a considerable stream of bright green color and of sufficient volume to turn a saw mill near at hand. The roof of the cave is square and smooth like the ceiling of a room, but below the passage is rough…with huge angular masses of rock, making exploration both difficult and dangerous." In 1967, country music star Johnny Cash visited the cave intent on taking his own life, but he left the cavern a changed man. "There in Nickajack Cave, I became conscious of a very clear, simple idea," Cash later said. "I was not in charge of my destiny. I was not in charge of my own death. I was going to die at God's time, not mine. I hadn't prayed over my decision to seek death in the cave, but that hadn't stopped God from intervening." Less than two months after Cash's cave experience, the Tennessee Valley Authority closed the gates on Nickajack Dam, forever flooding the historic place. That hasn't deterred folks from trying to enter the cave. In 1992, two scuba divers attempted to swim into the cave. One of the divers spent 14 hours trapped inside a small cavity when his oxygen tank ran low. TVA lowered the lake level so that rescuers could reach the foolhardy explorer.

Mile 1—Osprey—Situated on rock islands in front of Nickajack Dam are several osprey nests, Ospreys are abundant along this stretch of the Tennessee. They've chosen these remote islands because they are safe from predators like raccoon and, of course, they are surrounded by their food pantry. The only hawk on the continent that feeds almost exclusively on fish, they are often referred to as "fish hawks." Typically, they catch fish measuring 13 inches or less and weighing less than a pound. Though a deadly predator, its call is less than intimidating…listen for a high-pitched whistle that sounds more songbird than bird of prey.

Mile 1.4—Nickajack Lock and Dam—Here, we'll drop some 25 feet from the lake to the river below via this 600-foot long, 110-foot wide lock. The experience is a little like sitting in a bathtub after the drain plug is pulled. The dam (81-feet high and more than a half-mile wide) and accompanying lock were built between 1964 and 1967 to replace Hales Bar Dam, located six miles upstream, and render the Tennessee River Gorge commercially navigable. A series of nine locks keeps the Tennessee a viable 651-mile waterway from the Ohio River to Knoxville. Restrooms are available at boat ramp below the lock and dam

Mile 4.3—Burns Island Cormorant Rookery—At the head of this island on river left look out for double-crested cormorants. These birds fly AND swim, feeding almost exclusively on fish that they capture while diving underwater, propelled by powerful webbed feet. However, all that high–energy activity is tiring and thus, they spend much of their day resting in high perches where they can digest and dry their wings. They nest in large colonies like the one found here, building stick nests high in trees. Over time, their guano kills their nesting trees. Undeterred by the loss of their high perches, the cormorants will then begin nesting on the ground. You can see this process playing out here at the head of Burns Island.

Mile 7.4—South Pittsburg & The Lodge Foundry—Our pit stop for the day is at the boat ramp immediately upstream of the iconic South Pittsburg bridge, officially known as the Shelby Rhinehart Bridge. The modern bowstring tied-arch steel through truss bridge was built in 1981 and replaced the South Pittsburg-New Hope Ferry which operated up until the bridge's completion. Rhinehart was a state legislator from the area who served 36 years in the Tennessee General Assembly. South Pittsburg is famous as the home of Lodge Manufacturing, makers of cast iron cookware since 1896. In town, you can visit the Lodge store (think Dolly Parton-branded skillets); the Lodge Museum of Cast Iron where you can see the world's largest cast iron skillet and vote on whether it is appropriate to use soap when cleaning your cast iron and eat at Big Bad Breakfast, a popular breakfast restaurant. Once a staple of home kitchens, cast iron cookware gave way to modern, lightweight products in the mid-1900s, but over the last 30 years, it has made a comeback. Cast-iron quote of the day: "Our love is like a cast iron skillet. Hot and well seasoned."

Mile 9—Long Island & Alabama State Line—The head of Long Island (Alabama's version) sits 2000 feet north of the Alabama-Tennessee state line. Here, the commercial channel goes left despite the fact that it is more narrow than the right. STAY RIGHT to avoid encounters with barges for the final four miles of today's journey as you enter the third and final state of our journey! Long Island sat at the convergence of multiple Native American paths and thus served as an important river crossing. It was also home to native people for thousands of years. In the early 1900s, the eccentric explorer/amateur archaeologist Clarence Bloomfield Moore reported on three small mounds located on this island, one which measured 24 feet in height and 130 square feet.

Mile 10.8—U.S. Gypsum—On river right is this U.S. Gypsum plant which manufactures sheetrock. The plant went on line in 1999 and choose this location because of its proximity to both water and rail transportation. At the time of its opening, the plant received barge shipments of synthetic gypsum, an essential ingredient in sheetrock and the byproduct of a coal-burning power plant located "downstream" along the Ohio River.

Mile 11.8—Bridgeport Bridges—Originally Jonesville, the community that grew up around rails and rivers became Bridgeport in 1854 when the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad spanned the river across Long Island that same year. During the Civil War, Bridgeport, which was occupied by Union troops for most of the war, played a pivotal role in supplying Gen. William T. Sherman's army during the Atlanta Campaign in 1864. While occupying the town, Union soldiers constructed several transport boats and gunboats, enabling them to send supplies up river to Chattanooga and then south via rail into Georgia. During the war, portions of the railroad bridge were destroyed by Union and Confederate forces on three different occasions.

Mile 12—Mohawk Industries—On river right here is this fiber plant which extrudes nylon, polyester and polypropylene fibers used to make carpets and rugs. The plant has operated on the riverside since 1987, originally as the Beaulieu fiber facility. Archeological surveys conducted prior to construction of the plant uncovered a 1600-year-old Native American village site. Skeletal remains of more than 30 members of the village were found buried beneath a midden of mussel shells on the site.

Mile 12.5—U.S. Stove—On river right is this facility which manufactures wood-burning stoves. U.S. Stove has operated in the Bridgeport/South Pittsburg area since the 1880s, a byproduct of the area's close proximity to the necessary raw materials for their iron products—coal, iron ore and limestone.

Mile 13.2—Yamaha Marine —With one of its North American headquarters in Georgia (Kennesaw), Yamaha operates this facility on river right where engineers and technicians run tests on Yamaha boats, personal watercrafts and outboard motors from a 47,000 square-foot facility.